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Gerry Kahrman — The Province

Cap College's Amanda Beers (left) and Marie Rwigema share a laugh during practice for upcoming provincial championship.

Team ideal pays off

Win or lose, Cap College women want to have fun

Stories by Steve Ewen
Sports Reporter

They don't have any big-name stars. They don't go through a typical practice. And they don't seem to have a care in the world. But they just might be the best college women's basketball team in B.C. before all is said and done.

The Capilano College Blues, led by coach Paul Chiarenza, are a free-spirited, free-wheeling, good-time gang.

Just because they're easy-going, though, doesn't mean they're easy to beat, evidenced by the fact that they started the year at 8-1 before finishing at 14-4, good enough for third place in the B.C. Colleges Athletic Association standings.

Cap College is one of the teams to watch at this weekend's provincial championships in Kamloops. And you can bet they're going to have a blast going after the title.

"We really want to win for each other and our whole little idea of what a team should be," said Blues guard Marie Rwigema. "We want to win for the fun, team idea. We want to win to prove that you don't have to be a super psycho hardcore team to be a championship team. We want to win to prove that you don't need a coach that's yelling at you every other minute to be successful."

"Paul wants everybody to get the most out of it. He doesn't want superstars. He wants everybody to be a part of the team in every way. And when you don't succeed you feel like you're letting him down and letting down the idea of what a team should be."

The laid-back Chiarenza certainly has some kooky ideas by basketball standards. When he feels practice is getting monotonous, he runs his team through his "fancy lay-up drill," where his players must do something off-the-wall en route to putting the ball through the hoop. Or, instead of running wind sprints, he takes them to a

field out back and has them sprint deep routes while he throws them a football.

But, beneath all that, the 27-year-old has a firm grasp on team-building. He's recruited personalities as much as players, and his team meshes well. That's part of the reason why, without a single provincial all-star team player, they can compete with the likes of the first-place Fraser Valley Cascades, who have a half-dozen former high school stars.

"We've got a lot of natural skill on this team but we have more heart than anything," said 6-foot-4 centre Melissa Chancey. "We've got a lot of people on this team that will do whatever it takes to win. If it means no one scores except for just one girl, then we will do it."

And you can bet they'll do it with smiles on their faces.

The men's and women's college provincials start Thursday at Cariboo College. The semifinals are Friday, starting at 2 p.m., and the women's final goes Saturday at 6 p.m., followed by the men's at 8 p.m.